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ABSTRACT

Growth into literacy occurs most effectively with the engagement of the learner. The question is therefore: what motivates learners to sustain them through the struggle to attain literacy? In this aspect of literacy education, "lifewriting" can be a most powerful medium. Basic to all of the lifewriting programs described in the text, "Lifewriting: Self-Exploration and Life Review through Writing," and preliminary to much of the writing that lifewriting groups have accomplished, is the focus on talk--the many forms of dialogue, discussion, conferencing, lifestorying, and self-preservation within the lifewriting community or group. This talk generates social energy, serves each of the participants as an analytic tool, and provides a social consequence in a continuing series of gratifications. These gratifications will both sustain the process of life.creation through writing and concomitantly provide the materials and motivation for reading and writing. This continuing engagement, the search for additional skills in literacy and individual concern for growth and refinement, are all fostered through lifewriting. Attention should be paid to some recent findings from several different programs (including a Canadian program in adult basic literacy, a literacy program for physically disabled adults, and a program for technical students learning to speak English), all based on the principle that beginning literacy is founded on the oral and written expression of personal values, perceptions, and experiences. (Forty-three references are attached.) (SG)

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LITERACY THROUGH LIFEWRITING

The Foundations of Growth in Engagement

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LITERACY THROUGH LIFEWRITING

The Foundations of Growth in Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Growth into literacy, as with any learning, occurs most effectively with the engagement of the learner. The focus of this paper is therefore on the process of learning, and in particular on what motivates learners to sustain them through the struggle to attain literacy. It will show that in this aspect of literacy education lifewriting can be a most powerful medium. Basic to all of the lifewriting programs described in our text Lifewriting: Self-Exploration and Life Review Through Writing (Kendall/Hunt, 1988), and preliminary to much of the writing which lifewriting groups have accomplished, is the focus on talk – the many forms of dialogue, discussion, conferencing, lifestorying, and self-presentation within the lifewriting community or group. This talk generates social energy, serves each of the participants as an analytic tool, and provides a social consequence in a continuing series of gratifications, which will both sustain the process of life creation through writing, and concomitantly provide the materials and motivation for reading and writing.

This continuing engagement, the search for additional skills in literacy, and individual concern for growth and refinement, are all fostered through lifewriting. This momentum is immediate and permanent in both speaking and writing. The effective transfer with reading, which can then be further developed with more sophisticated texts, was discussed in an earlier paper "Lifewriting and Text Creation; Developing Response Through Autobiographical Writing" (ERIC/RCS ED 395 639).

This paper incorporates some recent findings from several different sources, including an innovative Canadian program in adult basic literacy, a literacy program for physically-disabled adults in a community-based setting, and some life-storying episodes, supported by sketch-drawing, from technical students learning to speak English as a foreign language. In spite of the great differences in these programs, they are all based on the principle that beginning literacy is founded on the oral and written expression of personal values, perceptions, and experiences.

LITERACY THROUGH LIFEWRITING

INTRODUCTION

Various studies over the years (Britton et al, 1975; Applebee, 1980) have shown that in traditional school settings student writing has been seen as a form of test, most usually as a test of the students' knowlege of curricular content, but often as a test of the students' mastery of writing skills. While students were expected to reveal in their writing their knowledge and skills (or perhaps their lack of them), their writing only occasionally served to communicate in any real sense. Only in the last decade has writing been promoted in textbooks and teachers' guides as a medium of learning, through which students are able to express their perceptions and questions about their learning. Moreover, these language functions can be seen rather to serve the teacher's purpose than the student's needs. On the other hand, modern approaches to the teaching of written composition (Hairston, 1982) emphasize that students write to communicate information for real purposes, and that writing itself can be the medium of self-expression as well as a form of creative activity.

Lifewriting, as a generic term for all forms of biographical writing, provides a large umbrella under which writers, both experts and beginners, can experiment with the expression of their ideas, experiences, and perceptions. The heart of a lifewriting program is the short life story, memoir or anecdote, perhaps a fragment of a memory which, through the collaborative help of a lifewriting group becomes a meaningful incident, better to help the author understand the recurring patterns or turning points in a complex life. The gradual accumulation of such recollections may become the history of a life, the beginnings of an autobiography, a family history, or a memoir of a brush with history. In this paper we are more concerned with beginnings rather than the developed forms because our purpose is to show how lifewriting can provide the door into literacy. Once the beginner has crossed that threshold, the infinite world of memory expands before the new writer, a compelling force to lead the writer towards the expanded forms of literacy.

In school settings, the need for self-expression is now well recognized and frequently accommodated within the pages of a writer's journal, whether as a private document, or as a communication between

student and teacher, and possibly for sharing with peers. The value of being able freely to express ideas without fear of the recrimination of marking and grading is also very common. Where lifewriting grows from these roots of self-expression is through the expansion and shaping of these stories of experience until they become worthy of the reader's acclaim. While it is now the motherhood of modern writing programs to develop process approaches to the teaching of written composition, lifewriting looks beyond the process to see the value for the writer, who having plumbed his or her personal experiences for the content of the writing, and perhaps having also bared a very vulnerable soul, now deserves the reward of seeing raw experience shaped into literary artefact in the protective custody and through the collaborative resources of the lifewriting group.

Lifewriting, therefore, may be seen as the the major component of any writing program, one which enables the writer not only to express matters closest to the self, but also allows for the communication of experience and the satisfaction of creating art from life. Through lifewriting, then, the writers learn to compose themselves (and the pun is deliberate). Whether it is at the primary level of education, or with community groups for elderly writers, and for all ages in between, we have seen the value of helping our participants to recover their memories and to express their ideas in talking about artifacts, illustrations, charts, time-lines, maps, snapshots, portraits, photographs, notes and lists. There is no doubt that the self is everyone's favourite topic of conversation. Bishop Mahoney (1980) said: "Human beings live to express themselves." But the corollary to that statement came later when he added: "You only become conscious of your own value when people listen to you."

THE VALUE OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Going beyond lifewriting, we use the term lifestorying to encompass all forms of written, oral, or even pictorial and video narratives of personal experience, which can be seen to be valuable in a number of diverse fields, both for the intrinsic value of the stories themselves, and for the effects which the process has on the storyteller.

In popular history, taperecorded lifestories are the basis of the works of Studs Terkel in the U.S. and Barry Broadfoot in Canada, and often become the archives of oral history. The I.L.G.W.U. publishes a

magazine to give expression to the opinions and stories of its ABE program (Nunez, 1989A, 1989B). Personal narratives are also part of the enthnographers' tools in the study of teaching, while the reflective power of lifewriting provides insight into education in such reports as Connelly and Clandinin (1986), Krall (1988) Monahan (1987) Johnson, (1987). Oral lifestorying is also an important part of Barbara Meyerhoff's (1978) anthropological study of a Jewish day-centre for elderly people.

The value of reminiscing, which, as we have often said, makes the present tense and the past perfect, is recognized in Yerger (1984). In psychiatry Robert N. Butler (1963) established the power of life-review as a process of integration among the elderly. In our own groups lifewriting enables people to settle old scores, when lifewrighting becomes "life righting." The therapeutic effects of life review show up in many studies: Barry (1988) in social work; Newman (1989), Daloz (1988), Haight (1986), Berghorn and Schafer (1987) from the field of nursing and long-term care for the elderly. Lea (1988) and Wolf (1984) also report the benefits of interviewing and storytelling in the process of life-review and reintegration.

In Jerome Bruner's (1988) study the subjects' personal narratives become the "individual's ways of telling and conceptualizing a life," and thus a key to understanding how the subjects "construct themselves."

In the field of the writing or literacy teacher, lifestorying can also be seen to have many benefits. Schwartz (1987). Christie (1983), Dickerson (1988), Pitts (1988), Stocking (1988), and Jensen (1984) all report on the values of personal narratives in the development of writing programs. Hart (1989) goes further to define functional literacy as the ability to function independently as a reader and writer. At the heart of her argument is that the writer must tell the truth about his or her experience, and that such literacy is fundamental to identity, culture, and survival. In her view the forthright telling of personal stories is the source of empowerment for lesbian and gay students.

THE BEGINNINGS OF LITERACY

In the "normal" world of a child growing up in a nurturing environment of literate parents, the door into literacy opens very early in life with the words: "Once upon a time ...." The world of fantasy is created through the magic of words strung together like pearls on a string, inducing the listener or the putative reader to string along with the story teller. In fact, the simple desire to want to know what comes next may

be the most fundamental response to narrative art. Scheherazade, after all, managed to keep her head (literally) by keeping the king wondering about the endings of her stories.

Adults, or even adolescents who have by-passed this door into literacy, or who have had this door slammed shut in their faces, may be too disheartened, too mature, too sophisticated, too cynical, too jaded, too blase, or simply too old to enter this world of delight in the fantasy of words which allow a cow to jump over a moon and grandmothers to be eaten by a wolf.

But there is another door into literacy: "Remember when . . . ?" How often in the course of everyday life do we use such an expression either in conversation with our friends or with ourselves when we connect the events of the present with our memories of the past? Indeed, a great proportion of everyday social interaction is spent in creating and telling stories about ourselves, our lives, and our memories.

"La realite ne se forme que dans la memoire," wrote Proust. But memory takes form and shape through our language. Susanne Langer (1953) reminds us that "everything actual must be transformed by imagination into something experiential:

> **The normal means of making the poetic transformation is language; the way an event is reported gives it the appearance of being something casual or something momentous, trivial or great, good or bad, even familiar or new. A statement is always a formulation of an idea, and every known fact or hypothesis or fancy takes its emotional value largely from the way it is presented and entertained.**
>
> (Feeling and Form, p. 258)

Even famous authors may admit, as Virginia Woolf confessed, to being a lifewriter, or can be accused of using their art to preserve their life experiences, as did Ann Morrow Lindbergh, when she wrote:

> **I must write, I must write at all cost. For writing is more than living, it is being conscious of living.**

Or perhaps we should look at the words of the century's most prolific journal writer, Anais Nin (now figured in the film Henry and June) who answered the question from an aspiring author: "Why does one write?"

> **We write to heighten our own awareness of life, we write to lure and enchant and console others, we write to serenade our lovers. We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection. We write, like Proust, to render it all eternal, and to persuade ourselves that it is eternal. We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth, we write to expand our world. . . we write as the birds sing. As the primitives dance their rituals.**
>
> (The Journals of Anais Nin, vol.5, 1947-1955. London: Quartet, 1976. pp.149-150)

Such compulsion to write is understandable in an aspiring author, and even moreso in a successful one, but our experience in leading many lifewriting groups and classes in a variety of educational settings and across a great range of age and ability levels, suggests that the rewards of composing and sharing stories about their lives will also sustain the person at the entry point of literacy.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

The Canadian Survey of Literacy conducted by Statistics Canada (1989) used as its definition: the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community. In this survey some 9,500 persons between the ages of 16-69, excluding residents of the Yukon, and the North West Territories, and members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and people living on Indian reservations or in public institutions such as prisons or hospitals, were tested in reading, writing, and numeracy. A screening questionnaire was also designed to identify "individuals with very low literacy abilities" who were not asked to take part in the rest of the tasks, which were aimed at measuring specific reading, writing and numeracy abilities.

The reading test asked the respondents to supply information from a variety of documents of everyday life, ranging from a social insurance card and building signs to a drivers licence, bank deposit slips, grocery labels, and a "Pool Schedule Seniors Swim." These items were ordered along a continuum of increasing difficulty in order to establish four distinct levels (See Appendix 1). An individual's level of attainment was then determined by the level at which he or she had an 80% chance of answering correctly. Thus the population was slotted into four levels of literacy:

LEVEL **DESCRIPTION**

1. Canadians at this level have difficulty dealing with printed materials. They most likely identify themselves as people who cannot read.

2. Canadians at this level can use printed materials for limited purposes only, such as finding a familiar word in a simple text. They would likely recognize themselves as having difficulties with common reading materials.

3. Canadians at this level can use reading materials in a variety of situation, provided the material is simple, clearly laid out and the tasks involved are not too complicated. While these people generally do not see themselves as having significant reading difficulties, they tend to avoid situations requiring reading.

4. Canadians at this level meet most everyday reading demands. This is a diverse group which exhibits a wide range of reading skills.

The "Highlights" of the results present some rather grim findings. While 62% of the Canadian adult population reached Level 4, another 16% (2.9 million) are adults whose skills are too limited to allow them to deal with the majority of written material encountered in everyday life, (Level 1 [5%] and Level 2 [9%] and others who did not attempt the test because they reported as having no abilities in English or French (2%). Of those who had completed high school, some 8% are at Levels 1 or 2, while of those who had only elementary schooling, some 60% were at Levels 1 or 2.

In many ways this Survey seems to confirm an earlier study of adult literacy by Southam News (1987) which resulted in many newspapers headlining the finding that more than five million (19%) of adult Canadians are unable to read. Similarly the release of the third part of the Survey resulted in the headline: "38% LACK WRITING SKILLS, LITERACY SURVEY SHOWS (Vancouver Sun, Jan. 4 1991). This seems to mean that a projected 6.8 million Canadian adults were unable to write a letter to a company regarding repairs to an appliance still under warranty. Another 1.9 million (12%) were unable to write a simple note instructing a household member to turn on an oven to a specific temperature at a certain time. But, of course, supposing the writer had been able to compose such a note, would he or she have any confidence that the household member could read it, and, if so, actually remember to perform the operation?

Such reading and writing tasks are dear to the test-makers' hearts because the language involved seems to relate to the real world of everyday life, but also because the nature of the task--the transfer of specific information--is amenable to a relatively objective form of assessment. Inevitably, such a survey depends or creates a simplistic view of literacy.

Yet so much depends on our definition of literacy. The language functions in this Survey are definitely at the "transactional" end of the function spectrum used by Britton and others in their research for the Schools Council Project (1966-75). We cannot guess what sort of results might have been attained if the questions had been aimed at the "poetic" or literary end of this spectrum. Indeed, it does not seem that the Survey asked the respondents whether they actually read any books, magazines, newspapers, or even comic books or for what other purposes they have used written language in their working or personal lives.

LITERACY AS SELF EXPRESSION

Our studies of emergent literacy among young children show us numerous examples of early primary or kindergarten struggling to express their ideas and feelings in forms of writing. Children, four or five years old, sometimes knowing less than half the letters of the alphabet, are able to compose written messages. Although this is not to say that they would do very well on the Survey of Literacy Skills. Our point here is that given the right conditions these pre-literate children can be seen to be taking the first steps on a road that leads to the development of a general ability to express their ideas in writing.

If we go back to the research report from the School Council Project of the University of London Institute of Education, 1966-71, we can see that the function categories provided a very useful tool for analysing samples of children's writing. Moreover, the term "expressive language" which was originally derived from Edward Sapir's Culture, Language and Personality still provides an effective bridge to conceptualize the movement from oral language to writing, and especially to writing at an emergement stage, when a person, whether young or adult, is taking those first steps along the road to literacy:

> Not only is it the mode in which we approach and relate to each other in speech, but it is also the mode in which, generally speaking, we frame the tentative first drafts of new

> **ideas: and the mode in which, in times of family or national crisis, we talk with our own people and attempt to work our way towards some kind of a resolution. By analogy with these roles in speech, it seemed likely to us that expressive writing might play a key role in a child's learning. It must surely be the most accessible form in which to write, since family conversation will have provided him with a familiar model. Furthermore, a writer who envisages his reader as someone with whom he is on intimate terms must surely have very favourable conditions for using the process of writing as a means of exploration and discovery.**
>
> Britton et al, (1975), p.82.

An alternative view of literacy development can be demonstrated in our lifewriting groups, especially as we will show how certain elements of our lifewriting program have been applied in three very special, but very different groups of adults: (1) the Invergarry Learning Centre of Surrey, in British Columbia, program of Adult Basic Education for immigrants and others who wish to improve their literacy skills in English; (2) the St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program for learners with disabilities; and (3) adult Czech students learning English at the Prague Institute of Chemical Technology.

In each of these programs we shall show how the social principles of lifewriting, provide a structure of social gratification which engages the students in the process of literacy acquisition, and sustains them in their struggle to improve their language abilities in both speech and writing.

THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES OF LIFEWRITING

When we organized out first lifewriting program in 1984 -- a three-month course for seniors, with the title "Writing for Posterity" (Butler, 1985), we had assumed that the motivating force for the group would have been the carrot of publication which we dangled before the eyes of the participants at the first meeting. It is true, of course, that the members were proud of the result, Recollections in Writing (Brock House, Vancouver, 1984). Publication has continued to be an important aspect of all lifewriting programs, and these people have since published two more anthologies of their stories, as well as some samizdet publications of photocopied class booklets.

In planning our first program we gave a lot of attention to the "idea generators," the "memory keys" to unlock the storehouse of experiences, designed to help the participants to focus their memories, to recollect details, and to shape the memory into a formal life story. In our textbook, Lifewriting: Self-Exploration and Life Review Through Writing (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1988) we discuss seventeen of the triggers that had proved successful in our classes when we used them to focus the group's attention. Teachers tend to think of these triggers as "the lifewriting methodology" (see Butler, Bentley, 1988), but now we find that it is possible to invent new triggers with every session. In fact, the success of a lifewriting session seems now to be much less dependant on the actual memory trigger than on the group processes that lead from talk into writing.

What we have discovered through our work with other, and more varied lifewriting groups, is that the force that powers the writing process is derived from the social energy generated through the nature of the life review process per se and the social structure of the group. From this we derive our view of literacy that people learn to write as they learn to speak, by first noting or writing the things that are closest to them, and that developing literacy is a self-generated process, fuelled by the social support of the group.

Consequently, in the planning of lifewriting sessions we have placed more and more emphasis on promoting talk among the members of the group. Whether in the form of a one-to-one interview, or the sharing of a life story among two or three participants, or the telling of already-written drafts, or the recording of a dialogue between two members, our aim is to make talk serve the social needs of the participants in the articulation of their stories. We believe that literacy begins with expressive language at this level of human interaction. Here is where ideas are sorted and sequenced, when events are given value, or when people recognize values in people and patterns of experience that had previous gone unrecognized, a process by which memories becomes articulate.

Perhaps the audible level of talk in a lifewriting room is a good measure of the social energy that is being generated. Such lifestorying is necessarily a social venture, although the gratifications are private and individual. Lifestorying , therefore, has its social consequences, first in the beginning stages when the lifestory is generated through the interaction of talking and noting, or in some cases, drawing and sketching, and begins to take shape in the interactive expression of ideas, words. and images. The personal

satisfaction of being able to generate a unique life story provides the initial engagement into the process of translating experience into words, first spoken, then written.

In Canada such a process is often used for emergent literacy early childhood, primary, and ESL classes, when it is labelled LEA for the Learning Experience Approach. Essentially, it means that the teacher's efforts are focused on drawing a story out of the students, whether individually or cooperatively, while also acting in the role of a scribe to manifest the students' words on the blackboard, chart paper, or a computer screen. In Kenneth Koch's work (1977) with elderly people in an American nursing home, he used volunteers to transcribe the words of those patients who were too severely disabled to write their words. In all of these situations the students' compositions, whether articulated in talk or on paper, became the texts for more reading and sharing. For those people with histories of failure in their encounters with text, when illiteracy is defined as the inability to grapple with mysterious symbols on the page, the social energy of the lifewriting group generated in this process of lifestorying becomes a guarantee of success. Lifewriting makes explicit the social consequences in the sharing of stories. Moreover, the intrinsic satisfaction of telling one's own stories is reinforced by the structure of the class and the skill of the group leader who can ensure that one's stories are listened to, or read by appreciative and supportive audiences.

The process becomes self-generating, because of the intrinsic nature of lifestorying by which self-expression becomes life-review and life-integration. Lifewriting, on the surface, is a group process, but at a deeper level, it gives each participant an analytical tool for understanding his or her own life. This is the hook, the catch that creates the engagement between the individual and the process of literacy. It is also the source of the power which will sustain the person to develop a wider range of literacies. Hence, in our lifewriting programs we now give more emphasis to the social principle of the group interaction which is paramount in the social consequences of composing and sharing lifestories. It is this principle which steers and powers each session, and gives direction to the whole program.

We have seen this happen with several of our groups, but nowhere more apparent than with our original group of seniors. After publishing their first book as a class book, completed during the course of one term, the participants then constituted themselves as an autonomous organization, The Brock House

Writers. Over the past seven years this group has become self-sustaining, and has applied for and received "New Horizons" grants from our federal government, which have enabled them to publish two more anthologies. In this case I think we can see that publication provided the participants with an external goal, but it is also clear that, as one of the members recently wrote, "the biggest asset of our group is the camaraderie we have established over the years. We all have established a bond which makes the class a gathering of friends rather that of just writers."

LIFEWRITING FOR EMERGENT WRITERS

Beginning writers, of course, will need more technical support, especially for their very first story. The ability to transcribe stories will fall short of the ability to compose stories, but the problem is not insurmountable. We have used tutors for people on the threshhold of literacy, and in one situation we had high school students recording the stories of senior citizens in a residential home. We can also provide the forms of lifestorying--the protocols and rituals, which help people get started and provide a scaffolding for continuation: "I remember . . . . I used to . . . . I like to . . . . I hated to . . . ." Just as parents rephrase language for their children so an instructor or tutor can re-phrase ideas for the storyteller, negotiating agreement on the words to be transcribed. In a well-established group the "buddy system" will give support to the weaker writer.

Through the group-talk of the lifewriting class participants learn to compose their expressive language in a shaping process which transforms raw experience into the forms of the anecdote and memoir. The implicit feedback from listeners helps the writer to make decisions about the story. Does it communicate adequately? Does it have a balanced structure? Does it say enough? Is there enough detail? Or too much? And the instructor can help in developing literacy to the point where the writer considers whether a story has a good opener, or a satisfying closer.

The techniques of story construction will contribute to the development of the individual's abilities, so that the shapeless non-sequiturs in the expressive language of the coffee shop or the sporadic, disjointed comments on a bus, become the stuff of which literacy is made. But it is a process that comes from within the storyteller, and it is the lifestory itself which provides the power.

WRITING IN AN ABE PROGRAM

The Invergarry Learning Centre in Surrey, B.C., a large suburb of Vancouver, provides us with a good example of a literacy program in adult basic education (ABE) for two reasons. First, its approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy manifest the social principles of lifewriting. Secondly, this Centre is exceptional in providing a public outlet for the expression of the students' opinions and achievement through its magazine, Voices, which also reaches an international audience and is accessible to scholars through the ERIC/RCS database (ED 313 924). Lee Weinstein (1988), writing about the development of these programs at the Centre for adults who needed to acquire or improve their reading and writing skills, states in the first issue of Voices (1988:I.1,39) : "I have never worked for a program where I have had such a good time and been paid for it. I love reading and writing, so it's easy to be hooked by students who want so badly to learn."

The two most important characteristics of Invergarry can be seen in his statement. First, the linking of reading and writing: all students who enroll at the Centre are interviewed about their needs in literacy, and at the same time informed about the literacy approaches which they will encounter in their groups. It is important for new students to understand this linkage between reading and writing. Even those who enroll strictly for the most mundane reasons of learning to read to meet the needs of the workforce are counselled about the necessity of being able also to write. And not only to write in the technical sense of learning to transcribe words, but more so to write as an author. All the new students are warned that they will be expected and encouraged to write about their own life experiences, their thoughts, and opinions.

The second principle in Weinstein's statement is implicit in his comment about enjoyment. The spirit of Invergarry is very close to the social principles of lifewriting when its classes become enjoyable and personally satisfying to the students and instructors. As one student, Linda Doerksen, said: "I really enjoy writing and having people read what I have written. My writing makes me feel so warm and wonderful inside. I sure hope other people will write stories or poems. The writing will help them come alive, because they have so much to give also."

It might be thought that emergent writers would have difficulty in finding topics to write about, but we all might envy Darrel Robinson who writes: "Coming up with something to write for my classes was a

breeze. I had only to sit down with my pen and imagination and put my creativity on paper." Each issue of Voices contains a section entitled "New Writers/First Words" which provides ample evidence of the students' achievements in writing about their thoughts and experiences. These types of stories are the first expressions of the emergent writers. Such topics as My Parents, Dad, Brother, Sister, etc. provide very easy, but engaging, entry points into the world of literacy. And while these first efforts are short, the stories still have the ring of truth about them. Once the writers become confident in their powers of expression we can see their stories becoming longer and more complex, although the titles still retain the personal flavour: A Very Special Goat, Anna's Village, Italy It Was, Hell In My Classroom.

The participants also use their newly-found power of self-expression to develop their own awareness of the world of literacy, or even their present classroom. In "Joe and I" the writer, Ruth, writes about the class, and listening to her classmate read his story: "I think Joe, our talk tonight about our school time went very well. I felt good about it, because I understand where we come from. This makes me feel good about coming back." In another piece written as a letter Ruth uses her own story to comment on a CBC TV program on Adult Literacy: "Right now I am making $15.95 an hour, and nobody knows I cannot read or spell at my jobs because we are professionals at hiding it." In the pages of Voices we can see how beginning writers can express their own views on a range of topics that span the field of human experience.

Such confidence in their powers to get their ideas down on paper, and then to use their stories as reading texts, derives from two sources. Voices, itself, contributes to theis effect by providing a print forum in which the students' voices are heard by other readers. Subsequent developments in this magazine include a column in which readers can respond to the stories they have read, creating a dialogue bewteen reader and writer.

As well as the motivation that comes from writing about themselves and their own ideas, many of the writers mention the enjoyment and feeling of security they get from attending the classes. Although the sharing of stories is a large part of every class, the ownership rights, or personal privacy, of each writer is protected, as Nicolina Amato says: "I love to write because I am able to express things I wouldn't share with anybody except God. I put everything in my writing: the feelings, the pain, everything like that. I always feel better."

Much of the success of Invergarry must be attributed to the social principles which make the classes a place of communication in safety. Rosa Ciszek comments: "I soon discovered this small school to be not only a place where you come to learn, but also a place and someone to run to when you are sad, lonely and emotionally hurt."

It is significant, also, that although many of the students enroll at the Centre in order to improve their employment possibilities, the skills of "functional literacy" become secondary to the delight of personal expression. Anna Armit commented: "For the first time in my life, I am not ashamed to write to my family." Ron Goddard also noted: "The classes did help me. I didn't like going to banks or writing cheques because of my spelling. Now, I'm able to do that," supporting our contention that the basic skill of personal expression is the foundation on which the specialized functions of literacy can be developed according to the student's special needs.

A LITERACY PROGRAM FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

The St. Chistopher House Adult Literacy Program in Toronto caters for a very special clientele of adult students. All have some physical or mental disability, some in the past have suffered from such labels as "CP" or "MR" (Cerebral Palsy or Mentally Retarded); others have been confined by physical disabilty to life in a wheel chair, or have severe hearing or vision problems. But like the Invergarry students many see literacy as "a link to employment and greater independence" (Shelley Butler, 1990), while other have such goals as to pass a citizenship test, or to correspond with the rest of the family. Because of the great diversity in their abilities, interests, and goals, each person is given the choice of whether to work with a tutor or in a group, and many of the learners participate in the training sessions for the new volunteer tutors

The relationship between a learner and a tutor is defined as a partnership of equals because the learners are seen as the ones best able to define their needs, and how a tutor can meet those demands. In many cases the relationship becomes a form of friendship, when the tutor is able to offer personal support.

The program emphasizes the active involvement of the learner, which means that the use of literacy in the partnership must be meaningful, and must build on the learner's success, achieved by focusing on

the learner's strengths in dealing with literacy materials at an appropriate adult level. Some of these activities are very much in the realm of "functional literacy," as when a tutor helps the learner with reading and responding to an electricity bill, or banking statements, or learning the literacy of the supermarket.

Lifewriting and lifestorying are also recognized as valuable parts of the program, especially when the stories produced become the text for shared reading. Some of the learners' disabilities preclude the use of pen and paper; some use a microcomputer, and some have to resort to BLISS for personal communication, from which some eventually make the transition to traditional orthography. Many of the examples of lifewriting included in the Handbook have been developed cooperatively by the tutor and learner in a type of Language Experience Approach to literacy, in which the tutor uses a variety of responses to extend and develop the learner's expression. Yet such is the central focus of the program that one participant commented, "I felt like we were doing a social activity, not literacy," and it is apparent that many of the functions of the normal lifewriting group also serve to engage and motivate these special learners.

LIFEWRITING IN AN EFL CLASS

Lifewriting and lifestorying also became key activities in courses on "English for Communication" taught at the Institute of Chemical Technology in Prague, Czechoslovakia (Butler, 1990). These students all had some textbook grammatical knowledge of English learned as a third language (after Russian) in their high school classes. Many of them were also adept at translating technical and scientific English in journal articles related to their particular field of study. Following the "Velvet Revolution" of November, 1989, many saw the need to be able to communicate with people from Western Europe, whether as part of the student exchanges that soon followed in this second "Prague Spring," or to use as a working language during their technical work experience in western countries, as it was obvious that English was rapidly becoming the lingua franca of Europe.

As the aim of the courses was to develop spoken English, a variety of group, partner, and whole class activities was used to develop communication, not simply between the instructor and the students, but also amongst the students themselves. Various forms of dialogue, panel sessions, group discussions, drama simulations, role playing, and interviews were used with a view to helping the students to become

independent communicators in the target language. An important principle in every activity was to organize the class so that there was a communication gap which speakers and listeners had to overcome in order to succeed.

In lifestorying the gap is obvious, because the speaker has something unique to his or her own experience to communicate. At first, this activity proceeded in much the same way as in a English-speaking lifewriting group, when the students were given various "memory-keys" to help them generate personal narratives.

At this point the methodology diverges, because the Czech-speaking students lacked sufficient fluency to discuss and extend their stories. The level of English syntax, and more particularly, vocabulary, could not meet the demands of expression in a new dimension of language experience. The solution was to use drawing and sketching as a means both to generate the words and grammatical structures to suit the story, and as a visual aid in the re-telling of the story to members of different groups. The expression of the lifestory in drawing provided a time during the class, when students could use dictionaries to extend their vocabualry to meet the demands of their stories, and when the instructor could circulate to offer individual help in finding the right idiom or syntactic structure.

During the telling and re-telling of the story the emphasis was totally on fluency, with the instructor breaking in to correct the language only in the case of a breakdown in communication. Yet in order to satisfy the students' own desire for getting the language right, they were offered the opportunity to write their stories, so that the instructor could make any necessary corrections. Eventually, there were enough stories to publish in another samizdat booklet with the title "Stories From Prague," (Butler, Butler, 1990) in which the Czech students were able to see themselves as published English authors, while their stories became texts for other students to read.

CONCLUSION

Common to all of these three very diverse programs is the element of lifewriting and lifestorying. While the applications and methodology vary according to the different situations, there is evidence that the benefits in each case derive from the social principles inherent in lifewriting activities. First, there is the

personal satisfaction in being able to create and express a unique story, whether as a form of life review, family history, memoir, or personal anecdote. In the re-creating and retelling of these lifestories the students are often able to integrate them into their life history, to find the value of the experience, and to see how they fit into a life pattern.

The individual need to express these stories in owrds, whether written or spoken, becomes the driving force iwhich powers the individual towards literacy. But just as important is the social reinforcement that comes from the sharing of stories, and the feedback that comes from appreciative listeners and readers. This is the social gratification which becomes a constant in the lifewriting group, encouraging the participant to strive for more and better forms of expression.

It is our belief that literacy for adults begins with the expression and consequent understanding of personal experience, a general ability that precedes the acquisition of specific items of functional literacy. While such surveys as the Statistics Canada may have some value in identifying problem areas of literacy, we think it would be a mistake for the literacy instructor to plunge headlong into teaching a number of discreet "survival skills." In our view this would be a clear case of putting the cart before the horse. Our experience suggests that the driving force into literacy comes from the expression of personal narratives, and that this expression provides the power that will pull the cart. Our view, by this analogy, puts survival skills firmly into the cart, and makes lifewriting the horse that powers it.

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